

VZCZCXRO9879
RR RUEHAST
DE RUEHBW #0797 1381606
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 181606Z MAY 06 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8604
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS BELGRADE 000797

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE (PEDERSON, ROBINSON, MITCHELL) AND DRL
(MATES)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: AMB DISCUSSES NEW RELIGION LAW WITH LEADERS OF
SERBIAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

REF: BELGRADE 678

¶1. (U) Summary: The Ambassador met Friday, May 12, with leaders of several minority religious communities of Serbia to discuss the new Law on Religion. The leaders expressed concern that the law is both discriminatory and invasive, requiring all but the seven "traditional" religious communities of Serbia to re-register through a burdensome and ambiguous application process. Ambassador Polt briefed the group on Embassy efforts to advocate changes in the religion law and pledged the Embassy's continued engagement on these issues. End summary.

¶2. (U) Leaders of the Serbian Evangelical Alliance, the Baptist Union and the World Baptist Alliance, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and the Center for Tolerance and Inter-Religious Relations participated in the meeting, as did representatives from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE), and Forum 18, a non-governmental organization that covers religious freedom issues. All concurred that the Law on Religion, passed by the Serbian Parliament and signed by President Tadic in late April, is problematic and opens the door to discrimination against the smaller religious groups of Serbia (for more details of the law, see reftel).

¶3. (U) The Ambassador told the group that he shared many of the same concerns, and that he raised these issues with PM Kostunica and President Tadic in recent meetings, in letters to both Serbian leaders, and in a personal phone call to the President. The Ambassador suggested that the religious leaders compile a list of specific proposed changes to the law -- either through new legislation to amend the current law, or in the current law's implementation stage. The leaders agreed that they would work together on these proposed changes and share them with the Embassy.

¶4. (U) The Ambassador assured the group that the issue of religious freedom is a deeply felt American principle and that the Embassy would continue to engage constructively with Serbian leaders to advocate changes in the law. The OSCE and CoE representatives said they would continue to advocate changes in the law through their channels as well. The Ambassador also added that the law would receive appropriate treatment in this year's International Religious Freedom Report.

POLT